

The Lady is a VAMP

Feeling the post-blockbuster blues? Kate Beckinsale kicking werewolf arse in a PVC catsuit might be the perfect antidote. Enter cult-in-the-making, *Underworld*...

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NOVEMBER 2002, A deserted warehouse just outside Budapest. And as Kate Beckinsale pirouettes through the air, twin pistols trained on a decidedly naked extra shivering under a furry werewolf costume, herself snug in tight black PVC, a number of questions spring into *Empire's* groggy mind. Highest on the list is undoubtedly, how on Earth did she get into that outfit? But more importantly there's this: How on Earth did the cutesy English rose, last seen picking her way through the debris of *Pearl Harbor*, the girl who was by her own admission, "always skipping PE to have a fag and not mess up whatever hairstyle I had at the time", ever find herself being all acrobatic in this inescapably B-movie scenario?

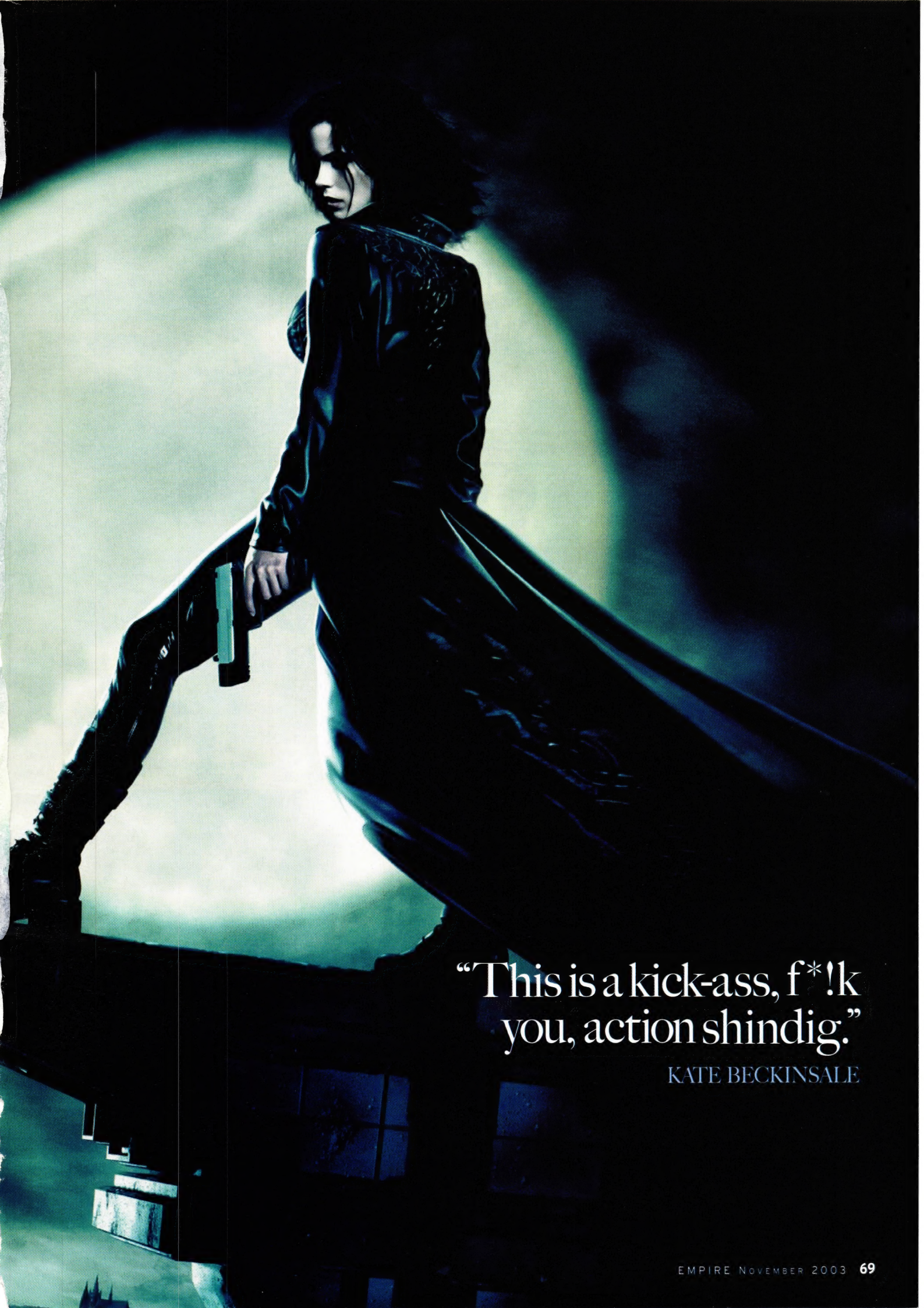
"Actually, that kind of comment really pisses me off," corrects director Len Wiseman, ducking out from behind his monitor. "Just because it's genre doesn't mean it's B-movie. And I deliberately went against all the studios' suggestions of the Sarah Michelle Gellars and Freddie Prinze, Jr.s, of this world to cast Kate and get away from that pigeonholing. I want people to take this shit as seriously as I do." Point taken, tiger.

In fact, rummaging deeper beneath the cult caper façade, it's clear that this is a project that's being taken very seriously indeed. Beckinsale

has undergone weeks of eating only chicken and cabbage (handy, frankly, being in Budapest), suffered a bout of pneumonia thanks to that outfit and sub-zero temperatures, and endured endless sessions of "that weird American yoga that Madonna does". And that's not to mention the trampoline, gymnastics and firearm training, as well as, "all that research into bats and garlic – you know, all that crap actors do that's utterly useless, but at least makes you feel like you're working for your supper."

Part horror movie, part love story, all "kick-ass, fuck you, action shindig" (thanks, Ms. Beckinsale), *Underworld's* truncated gestation goes some way to explaining its many parts. Ex-prop man Wiseman, having worked on the likes of *Men In Black* and *Godzilla*, was keen to have a go at a creature-feature of his own. The suits, however, wary of his comparative inexperience, were prepared to offer him only yet another sequel to *The Crow*. Unless, of course, he could come up with something involving werewolves. Werewolves, now they were where it was at...

Enter old pal and equal genre aficionado Danny McBride, and the pair hastily fleshed out a treatment in which werewolves and vampires become the Montagues and Capulets of their grimy, futuristic society, a werewolf-annihilating vampire (Beckinsale) falls in love with a member of the enemy clan (Scott Speedman), and *Matrix* - >>



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KATE BECKINSALE